ANDROID™

NETRUNNER™

THE CARD GAME

The Source

He had made it. Nasir carefully set the secure case down on the table in the middle of his workshop. It was a windowless room, and even though the sun was out and bright, its light did not permeate into his cave. He was tired, but the excitement of the moment kept him going. He was unable to extract the files from the quantum drive on the moon, as he had left most of his equipment in the control room.

Nothing much made sense to him about his whirlwind adventure. Rachel had told him his holiday was over. He could go back home, no longer a wanted man. Lily Lockwell had reported that there was a "false alarm", and the story had disappeared as quickly as it had appeared.

Rachel herself was an enigma. Who was she working for? Why was he allowed to walk away with the code? He thought back to their last conversation. It was right before he entered the Ferry to head downstalk.

"Looks like we came full circle," she had said with a grin. "Glad I didn't have to drag you all the way back here."

Nasir remembered standing there holding the secure case. It had been a long time since there had been someone looking out for him, even if her motives were clouded. "Next time I'll be dragging you out of danger."

She laughed, and punched him playfully in the shoulder. "More like into danger." Her PAD chirped. She pulled it out and glanced down at it. "Speaking of danger…"

"Rachel–" he began, but she cut him off.

"Call me Rae."

"Rae." It rolled off his tongue easily. With a wink she turned away, and melted into the crowd. He hadn't been able to properly thank her. But perhaps it wasn't goodbye. Perhaps he would see her again.

He shook the memory from his mind. He needed to focus. The drive was just a small block of metal. His hands were shaking, and he had to hook it in three times before he got a strong connection.

He brought up Edna. He hoped that the extraction was not corrupted. There was a good chance that it did not complete in time. To be so close…

A rap sounded on the door to his workshop. He froze. It sounded again, more insistent. They had found him. Of course they had found him. Rachel had told him not to worry about the mercs, that they wouldn't be coming after him. That they wanted to secure the facility once it popped back on the grid. That the drive was his dirty little secret.

But he was not the only believer. There were those who had been hunting the source nodes their entire life. There would have been signs, corollary blowback.

He loaded up his external cam. Static. He rebooted it. Static. It must be jammed. That was not a good sign. There was another rap on the door.

He began the decompression process in a safety net. It was a large file, and he did not know what it might all contain. The rap sounded again, even louder. There would be no way to keep them out.

"Who is it?" he called out.

"Delivery," came a voice from the other side.

He hesitated, and then cracked open the door, tensed to slam it shut. There was the face of a Japanese man staring at him. A Tenma. He slowly opened the door wider, and the clone handed him a small package wrapped in brown paper and marched off down the hallway.

He stared at it. There was a note on top. "Destroy the drive. -R."

"Hey!" But the clone was gone.

He ripped open the package. Inside was a data shredder, top quality. He glanced back at his rig.

"Decompress complete." He rushed back to his rig, shredder in hand. The files were there, in his safety net. Waiting. Waiting to be discovered.

He selected the file.

"Autorun initiated." The files were opening. There was a flurry of code running across his screen. 1s and 0s, old binary machine code. It was beautiful. But he had not given authorization.

"Edna, 'viceroy'!" The emergency password had no effect. He tried to run a manual override. He was locked out.

"Power surge de-de-de-de-tected." Edna was glitching. The code was moving faster, the numbers turning into blurred lines that chased each other across the display. The overhead lights flickered. The buzzing from his console increased. It was overheating. The screen flickered, and the code ran on.

Then it died, as suddenly as it began. The lights flicked off. He was in darkness. The buzzing from his console faded away. Silence. He counted to 5. That was when the back-up power generator would kick in.

5. The lights stayed off but the screen burst to life. It was white, and empty. There was a single cursor blinking in its topmost corner.

It moved across the screen on its own accord.

Hello world.

The data shredder dropped from his hands, and tumbled away, into the darkness.

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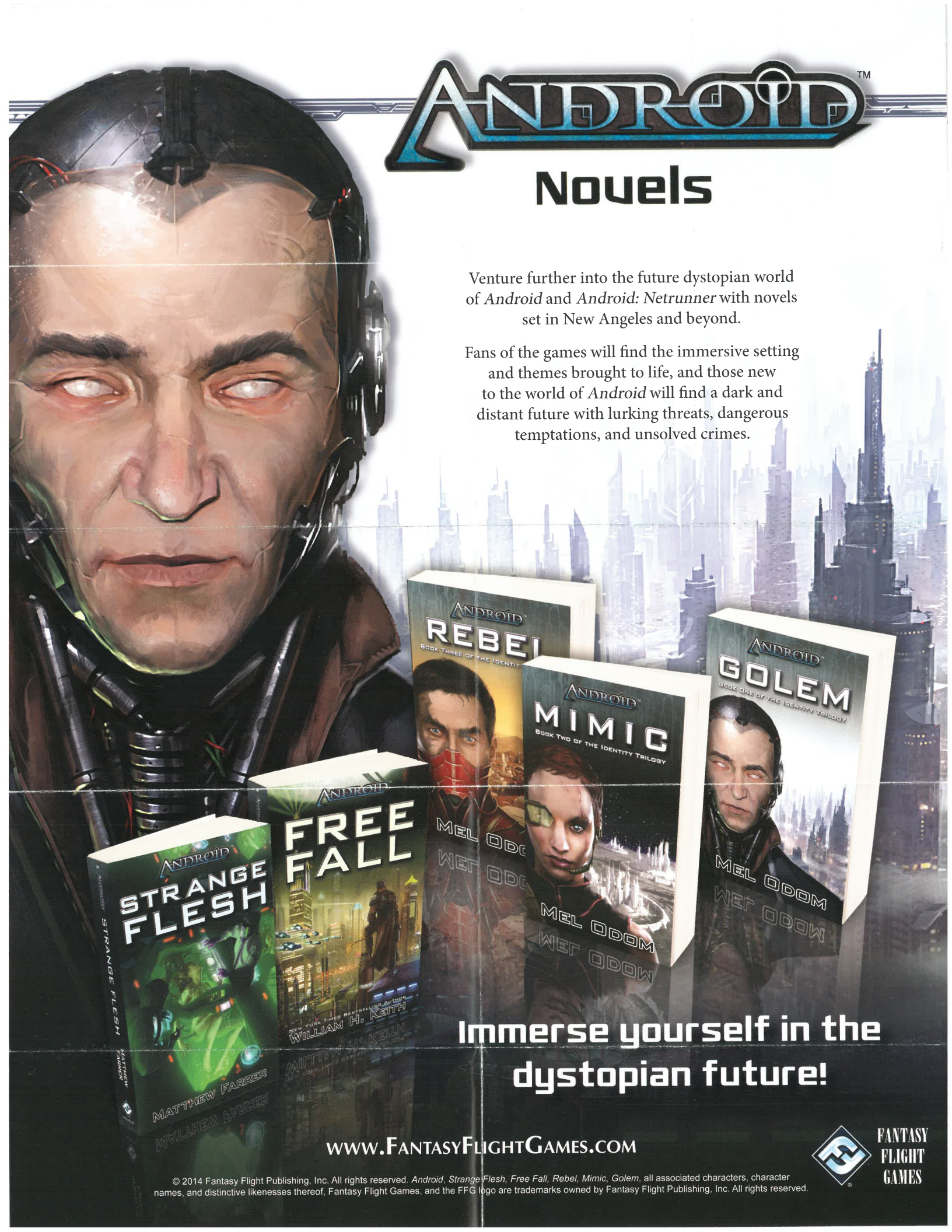

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